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0521402557 - Reasoning and Choice: Explorations in Political Psychology - Paul M. Sniderman, Richard A. Brody and Philip E. Tetlock

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REASONING AND CHOICE

Drawing on a multitude of data sets and building on analyses carried out over more than a decade, *Reasoning and Choice* offers a major new theoretical explanation of how ordinary citizens figure out what they favor and oppose politically. Reacting against the conventional wisdom, which stresses how little attention the general public pays to political issues and the lack of consistency in their political opinions, the studies presented in this book redirect attention to the processes of reasoning that can be discerned when people are confronted with choices about political issues.

These studies demonstrate that ordinary people are in fact capable of reasoning dependably about political issues by the use of judgmental heuristics, even if they have only a limited knowledge of politics and of specific issues. An important point is that both the well educated and the less educated use heuristics in political reasoning, but that the well educated tend to employ different heuristics and take into account more factors in their consideration of issues. A number of other important themes in public opinion and political psychology research are addressed, including the question of how consistency in belief systems should be interpreted, the interdependence of affect and cognition in political reasoning, the importance of education as a determining factor in a person's reasoning skills, and the importance of considering the dynamics of the reasoning process.

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REASONING AND CHOICE

EXPLORATIONS IN POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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[More information](#)

To

SUSAN SNIDERMAN

MARJORIE J. BRODY

and

PAUL CHRISTOPHER TETLOCK

Contents

List of tables and figures	<i>page</i> viii
Preface	xiii
1 Introduction: major themes	1
2 The role of heuristics in political reasoning: a theory sketch	14
3 Values under pressure: AIDS and civil liberties	31
4 The principle–policy puzzle: the paradox of American racial attitudes	58
5 Reasoning chains	70
6 The likability heuristic	93
7 Democratic values and mass publics	120
8 Ideological reasoning	140
9 Information and electoral choice	164
10 Stability and change in party identification: presidential to off-years	179
11 The American dilemma: the role of law as a persuasive symbol	206
12 Ideology and issue persuasibility: dynamics of racial policy attitudes	223
13 The new racism and the American ethos	244
14 Retrospect and prospect	261
Notes	273
Bibliography	285
Subject index	299
Author index	305

Tables and figures

TABLES

3.1	Knowledge of how AIDS is transmitted	<i>page</i> 35
3.2	National trends in attitudes toward homosexuals' civil liberties, 1977–85	41
3.A.1	Comparison of unstandardized betas in causal diagrams	56
4.1	Tests of alternative models, by education group, 1972	64
5.1	Principal components analysis of racial policy items	75
5.2	Principal components analysis of causal attributions for racial inequality	76
5.3	Principal components analysis of causal attributions for poverty	78
5.4	Univariate statistics for variables in the models, by education	80
6.1	Attributed and actual positions of liberals and conservatives	95
6.2	Attributed and actual positions of Democrats and Republicans in 1972	96
6.3	Attributed and actual positions of blacks and whites	97
6.4	Attributed positions of liberals and conservatives by ideology, 1976	98
6.5	Attributed positions of liberals and conservatives by ideology and education	100
6.6	Average thermometer score by ideology and education, 1976	101
6.7	Attributed positions of government on guaranteed jobs, 1976	107
6.8	Feelings toward left and right groups on government-guaranteed jobs, 1976	108
6.9	Estimates of attitude attribution equations	110
7.1	Log odds ratios for tolerance pairings	127
7.2	Principled consistency effect ratios by form of civil tolerance and racial tolerance item for persons at the extremes of education and political views	132
7.A.1	Observed and expected frequencies from cross-classification of liberals with more than twelve years of education and conservatives with less than twelve years of education according to responses to four tolerance items, United States, 1977	137
8.1	Unstandardized coefficients for regression of feelings toward conservatives on feelings toward liberals, by education, 1972–84	146

<i>Tables and figures</i>		ix
8.2	Unstandardized coefficients for regression of feelings toward conservatives on feelings toward liberals, by ideological identification, 1972–84	147
8.3	Parameter estimates for model of ideological affect, 1976–84	153
8.4	Predicted ideological affect for selected polar types, 1976–84	155
8.5	Estimated elasticities for models of issue positions, 1976–84	158
8.6	Unstandardized coefficients for regression of issue position on ideological identification, by ideological affect, 1976–84	160
8.7	Ideological change, 1972–84	163
10.1	Response stability and strength of identification	187
10.2	Stability of direction of partisanship in two presidential-to-off-year panels	187
10.3	Distribution of strength of identification in two panels	188
10.4	Stability of direction of partisanship controlling for initial strength of identification	188
10.5	Stability of direction of partisanship controlling for initial direction of partisanship	189
10.6	Distribution of strength of identification in the initial wave of two panels, controlling for initial direction of partisanship	190
10.7	Stability of direction of partisanship controlling for initial direction and strength of partisanship	191
10.8	Destination of nonstable partisans in the 1956–8 and 1972–4 panels	192
10.9	Destination of nonstable partisans in the 1956–8 and 1972–4 panels controlling for party or origin	193
10.10	Destination of nonstable partisans in the 1956–8 and 1972–4 panels controlling for strength of original partisanship	193
10.11	Lability of strength of partisanship among directionally stable partisans in the 1956–8 and 1972–4 panels	194
10.12	Stability and change in the direction and strength of partisanship – initially strong partisans	196
10.13	Stability and change in the direction and strength of partisanship – initially not strong identifiers	196
10.14	Stability and change in the direction and strength of partisanship – initially partisan independents	197
10.15	Financial satisfaction in 1956 and stability of partisan identification in 1956–8	199
10.16	Change in financial satisfaction 1956–8 and changes in party identification	200
10.17	Financial satisfaction 1972–4 and stability–change in partisan identification	201
10.18	Attitudes toward Nixon in 1974 and stability–change in Democratic partisanship, 1972–4	202
10.19	Attitudes toward Nixon in 1974 and stability–change in Republican partisanship 1972–4	202
10.20	Coordinate and contrary evaluations and the dynamics of Republican identification 1972–4	203
11.1	Impact of an appeal to law on attitudes toward set-asides	212

x	<i>Tables and figures</i>	
11.2	Support for set-asides as a function of an appeal to law, by level of education	215
11.3	Support for set-asides as a function of an appeal to law, depending on attitudes toward blacks	216
11.4	Impact of an appeal to the law on support for set-asides by education and attitudes toward blacks	218
12.1	Comparison of effect of Policy Index and Conformity Index on change to a liberal or conservative position on government assistance	231
12.2	Comparison of effect of Policy Index and Conformity Index on change to a liberal or conservative position on fair treatment in jobs	234
12.3	Comparison of effect of Policy Index and Conformity Index on support for minority contract set-asides for two versions of question	236
13.1	Correlations between liberalism-conservatism and racial policy preferences	247
13.2	Government help for unemployed by claimant's race and gender	250
13.3	Government help for unemployed by claimant's race and marital-parental status	251
13.4	Government help for unemployed by claimant's race and work history	253
13.5	Correlations between liberalism-conservatism and racial perceptions	254
13.6	Government help for unemployed by claimant's race for supporters of traditional values	257

FIGURES

3.1	Perceptions of the most serious health problems facing California	33
3.2	AIDS: public or personal threat?	34
3.3	The distribution of ignorance	37
3.4	Increases in support for civil liberties of homosexuals	39
3.5	Positive and negative feelings about male and female homosexuals	40
3.6	The generality of changes in attitudes toward homosexuals	42
3.7	Attitudes toward AIDS policy issues	45
3.8	Simplified causal model of attitudes toward persons with AIDS	46
3.9a	A causal model of attitudes toward protection of the civil liberties of AIDS victims among the poorly educated	48
3.9b	A causal model of attitudes toward protection of the civil liberties of AIDS victims among the well educated	48
3.10a	A causal model of attitudes toward mandatory testing among the poorly educated	50
3.10b	A causal model of attitudes toward mandatory testing among the well educated	50

<i>Tables and figures</i>		xi
4.1	Hypothesized sources of support of governmental racial policy	61
4.2	Alternative models of policy reasoning on the racial equality issue	63
4.3	Structural coefficients of final models, by education group, 1972	65
4.4	Coefficients of final models, by education group, 1976	67
5.1	Parameter estimates for a recursive model of racial policy preferences	81
5.2	Parameter estimates for a nonrecursive model of racial policy preferences (affect-driven)	84
5.3	Parameter estimates for a nonrecursive model of racial policy preferences (cognition-driven)	86
7.1	Measurement models of political tolerance, by activity, 1977	124
7.2	Measurement models of political tolerance, by group, 1977	125
7.3	Percentage intolerant, by group to be tolerated, for liberal and conservatives	129
8.1a	Schematic version of Levitin–Miller model of ideological location	143
8.1b	Schematic version of Conover–Feldman model of ideological identification	143
8.2	Ideological choice with different intensities	149
9.1	The Shanks–Miller model	167
9.2	A model of vote choice by education, 1980	171
9.3	Mean positions attributed to candidates and parties, 1980	174
10.1	Eisenhower popularity	184
10.2	Nixon popularity	185
10.3	Trends in presidential popularity	186
10.4	Classification of types of lability	195
11.1	A balance triad: citizens, the law, and racial policy	210
12.1	Support for government aid for blacks before and after counterarguments	227
12.2a	Percent persuaded to change position by ideology: those initially taking a liberal position	228
12.2b	Percent persuaded to change position by ideology: those initially taking a conservative position	228
12.3a	Counterargument against an initially liberal position	230
12.3b	Counterargument against an initially conservative position	230
12.4	Support for fair treatment in jobs for blacks before and after counterarguments	233
12.5	Support for college quotas for blacks before and after counterarguments	238
12.6	Support for fair housing for blacks before and after counterarguments	239
14.1	Structural model of hierarchical constraint	270

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0521402557 - Reasoning and Choice: Explorations in Political Psychology - Paul M. Sniderman, Richard A. Brody and Philip E. Tetlock

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

At first opportunistically, then programmatically, a growing band of us have worked to develop an account of how people reason about political choices. Though we are acutely aware of the limitations of our approach, we do believe it is on the way to becoming a perspective on public opinion and political psychology. So we have brought together a selection of research papers, both to lay out our general approach and to present some of our specific results.

Most of these studies are being published for the first time, whereas the remainder have been scattered through professional journals. This volume thus provides our colleagues in political science, public opinion, and political psychology their first chance to see and assess what we have been up to, all in all.

Typically, a book in public opinion offers a focused analysis of a specific problem – say, voting – relying either on one set of interviews or on multiple sets using the same questionnaire. Here we have drawn together triply independent studies: concerned with different problems, drawing on separate samples and even sampling frames, assessing different variables or assessing the same variable in different ways. These studies, though, grow out of a common framework, and so far as the results of each confirm the others, confidence in the overall argument should be increased. So far as the results of these studies are mutually confirmatory, although samples, variables, and measures differ, then the overall set of studies should convince even if each study itself is only partly persuasive.

Beyond this, the ideas we have been working on have changed by virtue of working on them. This holds particularly for the phenomena we want to account for. At the outset, the dependent variables were all familiar; now, in the studies of persuasibility, for example, we have somehow managed to land on new ground, and our exploration of it remains preliminary. The measure of our progress is thus twofold: The cumulation of studies has led to increased support for the core of our account of reasoning and choice, and to increased awareness of complexity at the periphery.

Our debts run in two directions. So far as data are concerned, we are part of the community of social scientists who benefit from the National Election Studies and the General Social Survey, operated by the Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan and the National

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Opinion Research Center, both supported by grants from the National Science Foundation. In addition, we ourselves have benefited from the support of the National Science Foundation (Grant No. SES 8508937), which underwrote the costs of data collection for the analyses reported in Chapters 11, 12, and 13.

Data aside, we are in debt to colleagues for ideas and encouragement. At the head of the list is Percy Tannenbaum, director of the Survey Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley. He has given us assistance at every step, and indeed is responsible for the original suggestion that Sniderman and Tetlock should initiate a research program in political psychology at the Center. Our colleagues at the Center have as much to answer for. Our debt to Merrill Shanks will become even more obvious in subsequent publications, but it already cannot be concealed, as Chapters 11 through 13 will make plain. As director of the Computer-assisted Survey Methods Program, he developed the programming that has allowed us to integrate experimental design and survey research in a new way. For that matter, we are in arrears to Michael Hout; and proud of it: One always owes one's friends.

Finally, we want to thank the *British Journal of Political Science*, the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, and the University of Illinois Press for reprint permission. We are additionally and especially indebted to two people for assistance in preparing the manuscript – indeed, so much so that however much were we to say they had helped, they might justifiably say that they had helped even more. So we will just express our sincere appreciation to Mark D. Spranca and Lani Kask.